

Message Discussion Guide

THE GOSPEL: HOW WE KNOW

The Church at Brook Hills . Dr. David Platt . May 4, 2008 1 John

This guide is to help you facilitate discussion with your Small Group. Use it as a resource to lead your group in discovering and owning the truths of God's Word. There may be questions you do not want to use and there may be instances where you just want to focus on a particular point or truth. Some questions may bring out emotions and cause people to dwell on their relationship with God. Your role is to facilitate this experience not to complete the discussion guide. Use this as a flexible teaching tool not a rigid teaching task list.

Connect . . .

Use one or both of the following options to introduce the discussion time to follow.

Option 1

Invite learners to share stories from their past experiences with others or from their own evangelistic experiences. Encourage them to share phrases or ideas of how the gospel was presented, such as "in your opinion, what does it take to go to heaven?"

- How do these phrases or ideas represent the way we view the gospel?
- Can any of these ideas harm how a person accurately views salvation?
- In what way could someone present the gospel to you in a way that is Scriptural?

Option 2

Read the following quote from David's message and then discuss the questions below: "Assurance for salvation is not based on your performance for Christ but His performance in us."

- What kind of freedom is found in the truth of this quote?
- How does this truth free us from legalism?
- What does this truth indicate about the way that we have assurance?
- Does the freedom found in this truth give us a free pass to live however we desire? Why or why not?

Review the Message . . .

Passage Background

Remind learners that John wrote 1 John to a church who was struggling with the idea of genuine, saving faith. Some people in the church began teaching a heresy, which denounced the humanity of Christ and, therefore, the person and work of Christ. The church watched as these false teachers, who had once appeared to be genuine followers of Christ, left the church and turned against the faith they had once claimed to be truth. As a result, the remaining church questioned if they could ever be sure of the truth and genuineness of their own faith.

The Contrast . . .

- **Superficial faith is always possible.**
- **Saving faith always perseveres.**

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Discussion Questions

- Enlist someone to read 1 John 2:18-19.
- Based on what you know of the background of 1 John and the verses that were just read, was it possible for members in the church to only appear to be followers of Christ? How?
- What does John call them in verse 18?
- In verse 19, what does John say would have happened if those who abandoned the church had really experienced saving faith?
- What does that say about the difference between false faith and saving faith?
- If a person doubts his or her salvation, does that mean he or she isn't really a Christian?

Application . . .

- Remind learners that at the beginning of this series David asked each one of us to seriously examine ourselves to see if spiritual deception is a reality in our lives. If the possibility of possessing superficial faith is possible inside the church, how serious should we be about truly examining our salvation? Why?
- Can you think of anyone from your life who has abandoned what appeared to be true faith? Would someone say the same of you?
- What is the danger of skipping our own personal examination? What is the benefit?
- What would be the effect of having assurance that your faith is real?

The Confidence . . .

- **Assurance of eternal salvation is a reality.**
 - **When saved, always saved.**

Discussion Questions

- Enlist someone to read 1 John 5:13. Why did John write this book?
- Based on verse 13, is it possible to have assurance of saving faith? Who does John say has this assurance?
- If John is telling true followers of Christ that they have assurance of eternal life, then what does this truth mean in regard to their salvation?
- Why would this assurance be important to a church that has experienced these false teachings and has watched some of their faithful members turn from following Christ?

Application . . .

- How do you feel knowing that assurance of salvation is possible?
- Other religions profess that eternal assurance is not possible. How does knowing that you can have assurance affect how you live? How does this affect your view of God?
- What would eternal assurance in your own life mean to your relationship with Christ?

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- **False Foundations of Assurance . . .**
 - A moral lifestyle.
 - Intellectual knowledge.
 - Religious involvement.
 - Active ministry.
 - A guilty conscience.
 - Positive thinking.
 - A past decision.

Discussion Questions

- Enlist someone to read Matt. 7:21-27. Remind learners that this passage was where this sermon series started six weeks ago.
- Based on this passage and from the circumstances of 1 John, encourage learners to name actions that do not provide a foundation for eternal assurance. Highlight the ones David listed from the sermon.
- Read 1 John 2:3-6. How many of these actions does John name as evidence for eternal assurance?
- If John tells us that we are supposed to obey God's commands, is that still bringing assurance based on our own works?

Application . . .

- If these activities don't provide a foundation for assurance, what does that say about how much our own actions can bring eternal assurance?
- Are any of these actions necessarily bad? What makes them poor foundations for assurance?
- If you remember a time in the past when you have said a prayer, signed a card, or "walked an aisle," does this mean that your decision wasn't genuine? Is the decision based on faith in your action or faith in Christ?
- What is the difference between obeying God's commands as evidence of saving faith and working for our salvation?

- **True Foundations of Assurance . . .**

- **The present truth of Christ in your life.**
 - **Am I believing in Christ alone for my salvation?**
 - **Am I abiding in Christ alone as my salvation?**

Discussion Questions

- Enlist someone to read 1 John 5:1, 13.
- Where does John say that faith for salvation is to be placed?
- What kind of actions does John name that should accompany faith in Christ?
- Especially for John's readers, what is the importance of believing that Jesus is "the Christ?"

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Application . . .

- In what ways do we cheapen the gospel by offering it merely as a means to get into heaven?
- If the offer of knowing God were the only “prize” for salvation, would we still want it?
- How does it make you feel to know that you can do nothing to earn salvation?
- If we look for other ways to assure our salvation, outside of Christ, what does this say of our view of Christ and His work on the cross?
 - **The present work of Christ in your life.**
 - **Am I obeying what Christ says?**
 - **Not holy perfection.**
 - **Instead, holy direction.**
 - **Am I loving like Christ loves?**

Discussion Questions

- Enlist a volunteer to read 1 John 3:21-24.
- Based on these passages, what are two evidences of Christ’s work in His followers’ lives?
- John states that Christ’s followers should follow His commandments and love others. Yet, he also says that if we don’t do these things and still say that we know God that we are liars. How do we reconcile these two statements?

Application . . .

- Emphasize the word “abide” in verse 24. What is the difference between abiding in Christ and striving to live a good life out of our own power?
 - **The present Spirit of Christ in your life.**
 - **Do I listen to the Spirit of God in His Word?**
 - **Am I led by the Spirit of God in my walk?**

Discussion Questions

- Enlist someone to read 1 John 4:4-6, 13-14.
- According to verse 13, how do we know that we abide in Christ?
- How does the Spirit give us assurance of salvation?

Application . . .

- When we have decisions to make, where do we turn first?
- If the Spirit can testify to our salvation, how do we listen for Him in our lives?
- In what ways do we see the Spirit working in our lives?

The Conclusion . . .

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Remind learners of David's caution that the assurance of salvation was never used in Scripture as an excuse to coast through the Christian life—actually, quite the contrary. Invite learners to discuss this idea aloud. What does it mean? What idea does it give us regarding the purpose of salvation?

Highlight the following three statements regarding the gospel.

- **Beware of spiritual deception.**

Examine our lives as to the true foundation of our salvation.

- **Be warned concerning spiritual inaction.**

Examine our lives as to any apathy or casual attitude toward sin.

- **Be working and waiting with spiritual anticipation**

- **By His grace, He will bring you to eternal life.**

Examine whether our lives reflect true salvation and assurance.